

Facilitating the Problem Solving Process



The incident HRS assists incident managers and personnel in resolving issues of concern by guiding participants in a problem solving process.

The objective is to more easily achieve desired outcomes on issues of concern. Problem solving actually takes place between the individual(s) with the problem, and the individual(s) with the authority to take action regarding the problem. The HRS, as a neutral party, guides participants through the discovery and learning process in problem resolution. The HRS documents responses as the process progresses. It is a good idea to have a flip chart or large piece of paper that both participants can view together.

Ground Rules

Lay some ground rules prior to beginning the process, by asking the participants if they can agree to:

- Actively participate
- Show mutual respect
- Allow the speaker to talk without interruption
- Put energy and attention into understanding fully what the other person is saying
- Share all relevant information
- Ask questions if further clarification is needed
- Stay focused on the issue at hand

Problem Solving Process

Guides participants through the following six steps of the problem solving process.

1. Identify The Problem
2. Generate Resolution Alternatives
3. Establish Objective Criteria
4. Decide On A Solution that Best Fits the Criteria
5. Proceed With The Solution
6. Evaluate The Solution

The participants provide the answers. The HRS encourages participation. At each step of the process, the HRS asks open-ended questions to draw out response by the participants. The HRS listens to responses, and then guides participants to the next step when appropriate.

Step 1 - Identify The Problem

Types of questions an HRS might ask the individual who presented the problem:

- "What seems to be the problem or concern?"
- "How do you see the problem?"
- "What seems to be causing the problem?"

Then ask....

- "What are your needs and desires regarding this problem/concern?"

Types of questions an HRS might ask the individual who can take action:

- "Do you have a clear understand of what the other party sees as the problem?"
- "Do you need further clarification?"
- "Do you have a clear understanding of the other participants needs and desires regarding the problem/concern?"
- "What is your perspective of the problem?"

If the perspectives differ – ask each party to further explain their perspectives of the problem. Ask participants to think about what their interests (needs, concerns) are rather than their opinions. Ask "what is the concern" and "why is it a concern?" Once the participants agree that they have a common understanding of the problem the HRS leads the participants to next step.

Step 2 - Generate Alternatives For Solutions

Explain to participants that alternatives need to be attainable and within limits of authority. The questions an HRS might ask both participants:

- "What do you see as some possible solutions to the problem?"

Encourage more than one solution by asking....

- "What are some other solutions that might work?"

Once participants have finished voicing their possible solutions...guide them to the next step.

Step 3 - Establish Objective Criteria

Types of questions HRS might ask to encourage input:

- “What if any criteria should be put on your solutions?”
- “What is it you want your solution to achieve?”
- “What would you like your solution to accomplish or not accomplish?”
- “What do you see as qualities of a good solution?” (for example: is it doable, fair, affordable, and/or acceptable to both participants?)

Once criteria has been agreed upon.....guide participants to next step.

Step 4 - Decide On A Solution The Best Fits The Criteria

Questions an HRS might ask to guide through this step are below:

- “Which of the solutions you discussed earlier will best meet these criteria?”
- “Which of the solutions is the least difficulty to act on?”
- “Is there anything that would keep you from acting on this solution, if so?”
- “How might those barriers be easily eliminated?”

You can use the following matrix to work guide participants through this step.

The matrix below can be used as a tool to measure the criteria against the solutions.

MATRIX

	CRITERIA				
	1	2	3	4	5
SOLUTION 1					
SOLUTION 2					
SOLUTION 3					
SOLUTION 4					

Placing "Y" in a box indicates that the criteria is met

Placing "N" in a box indicates that the criteria is not meet

Step 5 - Proceed With The Solution

HRS asks questions to facilitate agreement on solution:

"Can you both agree to the solution and put it into play?"

"When is a good time to get back with each other (a set period of time) to determine if the solution is working?"

Step 6 - Evaluate The Solution

The HRS contacts participants in a mutually agreed upon number of days, to see if the solution is working.

Additional Things to Remember

- Let participants talk and listen
- Stay in the present and future, not in the past
- Stick to the topic at hand
- Help participants to avoid put-downs or cross-complaining
- Look for and capitalize on areas of agreement
- Take a break if discussion escalates

- If a participant feels misunderstood, allow them the opportunity to restate what they have said in different ways until there is a common understanding.
- Watch what you say and how you say it, so that you don't give mixed messages and create an atmosphere of distrust

Encouraging Participation

Some individuals are reluctant to participate. The HRS can encourage participation utilizing the following techniques:

Ask questions – for example:

- “What is your reaction to that?”
- “What suggestions to you have to improve?”
- “Tell us more about that.”
- “Explain the difference between.....”

Ask for more specifics or examples:

- “Could you be a bit more specific?”
- “Can you give an example?”
- “What do you mean by?”

Paraphrase for clarity and understanding

- “Let's see Joe, if I understand correctly, you are saying.....?”